



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
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Internationalizing our schools

By State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster

We live in a world instantly connected via satellites, computers, and other electronic technology. Our children embrace the technology that makes those connections possible, but need the educational background through cultural and linguistic experiences that will prepare them for the global world of today and their international future.

Wisconsin has strong international education programs in many schools throughout the state. More than 50 percent of high school students enroll in world languages and many of those programs include travel that helps students gain first-hand cultural experiences. For many years, Wisconsin has nurtured sister state relationships with Hessen, Germany, and Chiba, Japan, that include exchanges of teachers, students, legislators, and cultural groups. Through Fulbright-Hays study scholarships, Wisconsin has twice sent groups of educators to Southeast Asia to learn more about the language and culture of Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. And, to further help the state expand its cultural horizons, Wisconsin signed documents this year to establish new sister state relationships with France and Thailand.

These activities are important aspects of international education in Wisconsin that are being coordinated and expanded through our statewide recommendations for global literacy. My Statewide International Education Council—a collaborative group of educators, business and industry leaders, and government and policy representatives—worked together to determine what Wisconsin students need to succeed in an era of rapid global changes: to understand world economics, peoples, and cultures and to function comfortably and effectively in languages and cultures other than their own. Recommendations from the council include five ambitious goals:

- global literacy for all students,
- world languages for all students,

(more)

- global training for all teachers,
- intercultural experiences for all citizens, and
- international linkages for Wisconsin businesses and government.

The council's recommendations ensure that international education moves beyond social studies and world language classrooms to encompass the entire curriculum. Most recommendations can be accomplished by refocusing on the content of what is taught in classrooms to include global perspectives rather than adding new subject areas. Additionally, international expertise already exists within Wisconsin's public and private colleges and universities to support many council recommendations.

Our students need exposure to international perspectives. Governments in other countries have embraced the challenge of creating world-class, highly competitive educational systems in which their students are fluent in at least two languages and understand the need for international travel, business, and commerce. Through the study of world languages and exposure to global perspectives, our students will acquire the ability to speak and communicate in a culturally appropriate manner with people from around the world and understand international interactions and connections.

Internationalizing education fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills and invites creative thinking. Teaching languages and cultures instills an early sense of human rights and gives us models for living respectfully in a global society. Internationalizing education ensures students access to a fast- and ever-changing 21st century job market and promotes citizenship. By providing a foundation of global connections, we educate our children for success in an international future.

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Elizabeth Burmaster is the elected state superintendent of public instruction.

NOTES: To download a high resolution photo of the state superintendent, visit the Department of Public Instruction "Media Contacts and Resources" webpage at < <http://dpi.wisconsin.gov/eis/vm-media.html> >.

To read the International Education Council's report, *International Education Recommendations: Global Literacy for Wisconsin*, visit the DPI's international education website < <http://dpi.wisconsin.gov/cal/interntled.html> > and click on "IE Recommendations."